

We Have One Job
3-Year Bible Reading Plan
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Bible Text: Psalm 78
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This morning, as we gather together allow me to encourage you to open your Bibles right to the middle to the book of Psalms, particularly to what we know as Psalm 78. This is the weekend, or at least it has been the weekend that we here in the United States of America celebrate our independence. If any of you were curious of where everybody spent their stimulus money, it obviously was at the fireworks stand based on last night. But nonetheless, this is a time that has often been marked by great celebration, however in the last days, shall I say the last weeks, maybe even the last months, one of the things that is consistently being put before us that we have become a culture, we have become communities and we have become a country that is in crisis. What I'm about to say is a very rare thing so mark it down: for once I actually agree with the talking heads. I agree with the pundits. They have diagnosed it correct. We are a culture and a country in crisis. That's the diagnosis. Here is where I divert from the proverbial pundits: they've got the prognosis wrong. We all can observe the crisis, we all can observe the chaos, we all can observe the tension, the prognosis is what is at the root of it and what can fix and cure it, and this is where we must take a divergent road this morning.

You know, it's interesting that we live in a world that everybody loves to analyze the problems but no one seems to have a solution, do they? And yet today as we go on into Psalm 78, we're going to discover that there is a solution and I know that I'm about to put the proverbial cart before the horse but what we need to understand is the cure to our cultural crisis today, the cure to a country in crisis today is that the faith of Jesus Christ and the belief in God's word must be passed to the next generation. If it is not passed to the next generation, then what we have been experiencing is just going to increase not only numerically but also in volume.

So today as we turn to Psalm 78, let me go ahead and calm your fears. We're not going to read the entirety of the Psalm, it's very long, but just the first 20 verses, and I'm asking a very rhetorical question today. We have one job and you think about it, when this life is done, when this life is through and you look back, we've really only had one job and that's to take what the Lord has done in our life and to make sure that somebody else hears the same message for theirs. It says,

1 Give ear, O my people, to my law: incline your ears to the words of my mouth. 2 I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old: 3 Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. 4 We will not hide them from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done. 5 For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children: 6 That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children: 7 That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments: 8 And might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation; a generation that set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not stedfast with God. 9 The children of Ephraim, being armed, and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle. 10 They kept not the covenant of God, and refused to walk in his law; 11 And forgot his works, and his wonders that he had shewed them. 12 Marvellous things did he in the sight of their fathers, in the land of Egypt, in the field of Zoan. 13 He divided the sea, and caused them to pass through; and he made the waters to stand as an heap. 14 In the daytime also he led them with a cloud, and all the night with a light of fire. 15 He clave the rocks in the wilderness, and gave them drink as out of the great depths. 16 He brought streams also out of the rock, and caused waters to run down like rivers. 17 And they sinned yet more against him by provoking the most High in the wilderness. 18 And they tempted God in their heart by asking meat for their lust. 19 Yea, they spake against God; they said, Can God furnish a table in the wilderness? 20 Behold, he smote the rock, that the waters gushed out, and the streams overflowed; can he give bread also? can he provide flesh for his people?

Now as we read this passage and make the parallel from the ancient Jewish Israeli culture to our own today, two main principles or points that I want to address and that's the obstacles that you and I are facing today coupled with the opportunity or the opportunities that we also possess.

Let's deal with the obstacles and I'm gonna go ahead and share with you this is where the majority of our time is gonna be spent today because I think if we're going to diagnose a culture that is in crisis, a country that is in crisis, maybe we ought to diagnose it properly for what we're actually dealing with. Now I get nervous when I make this "subpoint" but the first thing we've gotta do is look at the facts. You say, "Well, why do you get nervous?" Because many of you are familiar with my new sarcastic motto in life, "Don't let the facts get in the way of your personal agenda." Some of you will catch that in a moment. But let's look at the facts. What is the world that you and I are actually living in today? You know, it's funny we claim that as a, I guess a culture of humanity, how much we've evolved but have you noticed that we haven't evolved much at all? We still possess the same problems, the same inadequacies, and we still repeat the same mistake. The problem with history is we end up repeating it, do we not?

So let's look at some of the facts. Fact #1. No matter how much time you spend in God's word, the world is going to out-quantify the amount of information. Verse 1, "Give ear, O my people, to my law: incline your ears to the words of my mouth." It begins by making this plea, "Please pay attention to what God is saying in your life." And that is the world that we're living in today, it is a world that is dominated by the headlines, the news lines, by social media. And even if you're one of those, let's say you're like John Wesley, one of the original founders of what we know as the Methodist denomination, who got up three to four hours before his day started to spend time in Bible study and prayer, even if you devoted that much time to Scripture reading, you do understand that the world at large is going to out-quantify it by the end of the day. The amount of information that we receive by way of television and internet and our smartphones and text messages and whatever it may be, it comes at just a reckless pace and speed. And so one of the things we must analyze and, shall we say, admit, is no matter how much time we desire to and actually spend focusing on the things of God, the amount of "stuff" we're gonna observe in the world is going to out-quantify it.

Fact # 2. The world at large is rarely or ever going to get it. Notice what it says in verse 2, "I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old." Interesting, particularly when you speak of a parable, because we know that this is a means that Jesus Christ communicated with quite frequently in the Gospels. In fact, we have 32 recorded parables where he will speak a story that not only has a general but oftentimes very specific doctrinal points therein, and what's interesting about the parables is that the one of the sower which, by the way, is one of the most commonly referred to and well-known parables, Jesus tells this story about a man who goes to sow. By the way, he does give an explanation that that which he is sowing, the seed, is the word of God. He says that there are four ways of which humanity can respond to the seed being put out. The first way is that we ignore it and the fowls of the air come and take it away. The second one is that we get real excited and we begin to blossom but because there is no root we quickly fade away. The third one begins a process of great growth and stamina until it becomes unfruitful by the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches and other things. And last but not least, there is that which falls on the good ground and it produces some 30, some 60, some 100 fold.

Now interesting, Jesus tells this parable and the disciples come to him and say, "We don't quite get this. We don't understand what are the fowls of the air? What is the seed exactly? Can you help us out?" There are two things I want to call your attention to that Jesus says in that parable that relate here to Psalm 78. The first one is this: he told them that if you get this parable, you'll get all of them. In other words, every single parable is how do we respond to the word of God in our life. What does he say here in verse 2? We will utter in a parable the dark sayings of old. But it's the second aspect of a parable I want you to hear. Jesus did not just communicate parables by "happenstance." He did not show up and say, "You know, I think it's a good idea to communicate in a way that most will not understand." He told them, "If you get this parable, you'll get them all," and then he said, "I'm speaking these parables so that those who do not believe, those who have malintent, it will fall on deaf ears."

Now has that ever bothered you before? Why would Jesus purposely communicate so that people couldn't understand? Because according to Mark 2, he knows what is in people's hearts and if you wanted to know the truth, you got it. If you were only there to cause a scene or to put him in a "proverbial corner," you wouldn't catch what he was saying. Now this is all rooted in Isaiah 6. Way back in the Old Testament we know Isaiah 6 as the great missionary passage. Here is this man by the name of Isaiah, has this traumatic event in life where the king passes away and his life is not guarded by any others. It was in that moment of tragedy he sees the Lord high and lifted up. Remember it says that he saw the pillars shake, he saw the train of the Lord's robe, and he declared, "I am a man of unclean lips. I reside among people of unclean lips." And a seraphim, a specific angelic being comes and takes a coal off the altar of the Lord and places it on his mouth. The Lord asked, "Who will go for us? Who shall I send?" Remember what Isaiah says? "Send me, Lord! Send me!" One of the problems was he forgot to ask the details of the assignment and the Lord said, "Here's what I want you to do. I want you to go and I want you to speak to the people." And he basically communicates that he will speak in parables, he will speak in illustrations that – listen to this – 90% of them will not get it.

You know when we talk about tithing, that that's "10% of our resources"? You know we actually get the 10% from Isaiah 6. He says, "A tithe of them or a tenth of them will get it." In other words, what we've got to understand today is that the world at large rarely if ever is going to get and comprehend the truth of God's word and the statistics prove it. We live in a world today where evangelical Christians, and I know that's a term that has been politicized so allow me to use it theologically, an evangelical Christian is someone who believes that Jesus Christ alone is satisfactory for the salvation and the forgiveness of their sins, the Bible is true from beginning to end, Jesus was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, died a sacrificial death, rose from the grave and he's coming back again. Less than 10% of Americans are now evangelical Christians.

I was sharing this with our men's Bible study group on Tuesday morning. That means that out of every conversation that you have about the truth of God's word, 9 out of 10 people are gonna look at you like a calf at a new gate. They're not gonna get it and yet the frightening thing is, as we'll address in just a moment, those percentages are steadily beginning to decrease. We used to just a generation ago be in some solid double digits and here we find ourselves at less than 10%. And by the way, those are both sacred and secular sources, and both when the "church and the world agrees," you'd better pay attention to the data.

But here's the third fact. Let me repeat the first two just so we can have a refresher course. Fact #1 is this: it doesn't matter how much time you spend in God's word, the world is going to out-communicate it as far as quantity is concerned. Number 2: we discover the fact that the world at large is not gonna get the message of God's word. And here's fact #3: you cannot pass on to the next generation that which you do not possess yourself. I want you to notice what it says in verse 3, "Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works

that he hath done." You know, we talk about a culture that is in crisis, a country that is in crisis, let's just call it what it is: we, the church, the people of Jesus Christ at least here in this country, in this culture, we have been on a steady decline for multiple decades. Look at the data. Look at the figures. In fact, it was just released in recent days that we, the good old Southern Baptists, and when I say good old Southern Baptists, not only are we the "largest Protestant denomination in America," we are the most evangelistic denomination in America and we just reported again that 10 out of the last 11 years, you guessed it, we declined. We've lost members. We've lost attenders. And by the way, the data was before Covid-19. You can't count this mess. And baptisms again went down. You realize we now live in a society, at least here in America, where we are quantifiably baptizing less people today than we did before World War II yet the population has tripled and the baptisms have declined. Some of you remember 1953, Southern Baptist Convention motto was "A million more in '54." We can't even hit 25% of that today and we have three times as many people. Why do you see this steady decline? Because if Generation A does not pass on their faith to Generation B, I can almost guarantee you C is not gonna hear it. And as we find ourselves now in consecutive generations where we have not taken our faith so seriously as to make sure that the "next generation" hears it, why are we surprised at what we got?

So there are the facts, folks. Lest you think it's gonna get any more positive, go down to verse 9. Here's the second obstacle that we need to face: that we have become a people, at least a people of faith that are fearful. Notice what it says here in verse 9, it says that Ephraim being armed, carried bows and turned back in the day of battle. Now I want you to think about that for just a moment. Here were the people of God armed with all the weaponry they needed, going against a foe that God said, "You will defeat," and they got scared and high-tailed it and ran at the opposite direction. Now we talk about the facts that we're dealing with, let's talk about how we've become people who are fearful even though the Bible says we don't have the spirit of fear but of power and of love and of a sound mind. You say, "Well, I don't think I'm necessarily in battle." Yes, you are. According to Ephesians 6, you as a child of God, as a believer in Jesus Christ, are to arm yourself every day against the wiles of the devil. We do not fight against flesh and blood. Sometimes I wish that's all it was, but against powers and principalities and the rulers of darkness, therefore gird yourself with the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the helmet of salvation, the shield of faith, the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God, and make sure your feet are shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace. You realize that in the battle of life as a believer, the only offensive weapon you've got is the Bible. In Hebrews 4 it says the Bible, the word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword which means that you possess a weapon that cannot be outmatched.

Now many of you have found yourself in this situation before and I understand it can be "a fearful experience." Maybe it's at the workplace. Maybe it's at a casual environment where the things of our faith or the things of Scripture or whatever come to light, have you ever heard somebody say, "Well, I don't believe in all that stuff because the Bible's got errors"? Now I'm going to give you some very good advice: when you're in an environment whether it's an academic environment or casual environment and somebody claims the Bible is full of errors, here's how you need to simply respond, "Okay, fine, just

show me one." There will be silence because most people claim it has errors they don't even know that in there. They've heard from a friend, who's heard from a friend, who's heard from a friend that there's problems with it. That being said, even if they do have a "actual case," listen, hear them out and say, "Okay, I'll tell you what, give me a couple days. I'll come back to you on that one."

What does the Bible say in its own testimony? It is sharper than any two-edged sword which means that any argument, any discussion, any debate that we enter in this world, that the Bible as we know it can and does possess victory. Here's the problem: most of us rather than carrying a massive, double, sharp, two-edged sword are carrying a rusty old pocketknife. You say, "Well, how do you know that?" Because our country has become biblically illiterate. You know, most people would be shocked to find out that in the 18th century, oh, that's back when we started, that Congress actually commissioned, paid for, and put Bibles in all the public schools. Wow. That seems like ancient history because it is ancient history. We used to possess a double-edged sword, now we've got a rusty old pocketknife and we wonder why we lose battle after battle after battle.

Who is he talking to? He's talking to the believers. We can get mad at the world all we want but if we as believers don't know what the word of God says, if we don't apply it in our life, how would we ever expect the world at large to do so?

Here's the third obstacle: they forgot. Notice what it says here in verse 11, "They forgot his works and the wonders that he had shown them, the marvelous things." You know, as we celebrate on this Independence Day weekend, I think sometimes we forget how impactful the Bible, the Scriptures have actually been on our country. Now I understand and it's been brought to very bright light in recent days that many of our founders and many of the shapers of our country were not perfect men. I get that and so do you. And just because you're wrong on one issue doesn't mean you're wrong on all of the issues, in fact, can I make a parallel to what's happening in our culture today? Here's what we're doing: we're saying that if somebody was wrong on an issue 200 years ago, then they don't deserve to be acknowledged at all. That is a very dangerous thing to do because I promise you that you hold to something today that you didn't 10 years ago. So do we erase the last 10 years of your life? You see, we have forgotten that people grow. We have forgotten that cultures grow and that countries grow.

Let me give you an illustration. It's a little close to home. Five hundred years ago what we know as the Protestant Reformation was established. We pulled ourselves out of an ecclesiastical religious system that was stifling humanity and do you know what we declared? It's by faith alone, through Christ alone, through Scripture alone. Revolutionary, is it not? Some of the people who were instrumental in that cause, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Huldrych Zwingli, ??, I could go on and on. I promise you not one of those guys could be a member of this church. You say, "What do you mean they couldn't be a member of this church?" Go look up what they believed about baptism. Look up what they believed about the Lord's Supper. So do we take those guys and say, "No longer. We'll have nothing to do with you." What we need to recognize is they were coming out of a stifling system and they were the first generation to experience the true

freedom in Christ, and you cannot expect a baby Christian to act like a mature Christian, much like you cannot expect the first generation to act like the 14th generation.

Here it says they forgot. So today allow me to remind you what many of these great individuals, though very imperfect, have stated. Let's go back to our first President, George Washington, who stated, "It is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible." Thomas Jefferson, "I've always said that a studious perusal of the Bible will make better citizens, better fathers, and better husbands." Andrew Jackson, "The Bible is the rock upon which our Republic rests." John Quincy Adams, "So great is my veneration for the Bible that the earlier my children began to read it, the more confident I will be, my hope that they will prove useful citizens of their country and respectable members of society." Abraham Lincoln, "It is the duty of nations as well as men to owe their dependence upon an overruling power of God and to recognize the sublime truth announced in the Holy Scriptures proven by all of his history and those nations are blessed by God who are the Lord's." The Bible is the best gift God ever gave to man. Unless you think we're already politically incorrect, get ready for the big one. Woodrow Wilson would not be asked to be on a local or any national network because he said, "America was born a Christian nation." God forbid, he said that. Harry Truman, "The Bible is the moral code of our nation and of civilization." Ronald Reagan, "No book has so molded the life of a nation as the Bible has shaped America. It has been America's hope, it's foundation, it's mode or character. The Bible has sustained America throughout its 200 year history and is the only hope of security for the years ahead."

Now lest you see the last few moments of just happenstancely grabbing old quotes from the ancients, allow me to make it a little more personal. You know, oftentimes we talk about the greatest generation, that generation that gave so much for our freedom and our liberty. I'm privileged to say that both my grandfathers served as a part of that generation in what we know as World War II, and on my mom's side, her father served in the United States Coast Guard, served for several years and something happened in his life that happened in every enlistee's life in those days, upon being issued a uniform, you got it, in the United States of America they were issued a New Testament. This is it. It's even got the logo of the United States Coast Guard right here. And a message from President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, "As Commander in Chief, I take pleasure in commending the reading of the Bible to all who serve in the Armed Forces of the United States. Throughout the centuries men of many faiths, or diverse origins, have found the sacred book's words of wisdom, counsel, inspiration. It's a fountain of strength and now as always an aid in attaining the highest aspirations of the human soul."

Allow me to share with you, ladies and gentleman, the path that we have recently taken is the path less taken, the path that has been upon, has been that of reverence for and veneration not only for the Lord himself but Scripture and we have forgotten. Why? Because some people were wrong on some issues and they were, and so we've just eliminated them altogether.

The other obstacle is one of faithlessness. In fact, beginning here in verse 17 it talks about they sin more against God, the picture or the image that we have is being in the

wilderness and I find it interesting what it says here in verse 19, "they spoke against God and said, Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?" These are the same people who saw the plagues. These are the same people who saw the water turn into blood, the frogs, the lice, the boils, what we know as the Passover. The same individuals who walked through dry land in the Red Sea and the Egyptians got completely wet. What happened? It's what happens in most of our lives, within 11 days of reaching their destination do you know what they had the audacity to say? "We had it better in Egypt. Can God provide us a table?" Look how faithless they are. This is the same God who would bring water out of a rock, food from the sky, and their clothes and their shoes would never wear out.

And yet we have become faithless, have we not? Can God? Can he really furnish a table in the wilderness? Let's just call it what it is. It kind of feels like the wilderness right now, doesn't it? Think about that. For 40 years what did the Israelites do? They got up every day and took a lap. I mean, that's what they did, right? They just took a lap. Is that not what it feels like? In fact, I had somebody message me the other day, "It feels like I'm living out the movie 'Groundhog Day.' I wake up every day and it's the same story, just a different flavor, and it never goes away." Folks, we're in a wilderness experience and yet how many are saying, "I don't know if God can"?

You see, the problem isn't if God can, the issue is do we respond appropriately. Now I know I have been the bearer of much "bad news," but folks, those are the obstacles. The facts are what they are. We as believers have somehow become fearful and retreated from the battle. We have forgotten our "spiritual, biblical roots," and we've become faithless, believing somehow, somehow God just can't do what God has done in days past which allows us to hopefully see today the opportunities. In fact, I strategically left out verses 5 through 8 because that is the passage where it says that we are to take that which we have, our faith, that which we believe and to make sure that not only the next generation but the generation that hasn't been born and their children get the message.

So here are the opportunities that lie before us. Some very simple observations/rhetorical questions. Number 1 is this: what is it, what is it that we're to do? We're to take that which we possess and make sure the next generation possesses it. Now you may be saying, "Well, I no longer have kids in the home, grandkids in the home. I don't even have any biological children." The next generation can be the person who you live next door to, the person you work with, you're friends with, play ball with. Don't think in terms of bloodlines as much as anybody who is "younger than you" by a generation and/or more. We want to make sure that those coming behind us, that our faith – listen – does not die with us. And the statistics are frightening. When you talk about faithfulness to a "local congregation" not only with attendance but with giving, for every one of the "greatest generation" and the following generation that die, it is taking five young people to replace them. Five. And yet the numbers are going inverted to that.

So we know what the "what" is, the second one is this: why? Why is it so critical? Well, you may have heard this before and it stands true today that Christianity is simply one generation away from extinction. And that's true. If the apostles had not shared, we would not have heard. If the great Reformers had not brought us back to truth, we would not

have heard. We can go all the way back through history. I've got news for you, I've been around and I've heard what's going on in the world, Christianity is not going to go extinct in the next generation worldwide, but it may go extinct here. If we're already down in the single digits, the projections are if things don't "change," the next generation of evangelical Christians will be somewhere between 3 and 4%. Why? Because our faith in our culture is becoming extinct.

The next question I want to focus on, there's the who? Who? Remember what Jesus said in Matthew 28? "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel." "Ye" stand for you and me so that means all of us. But I want to get more specific for just a moment. Many of you have heard data such as this in some capacity. Allow me to share with you that which is most prevalent as far as my research is concerned. I want to pose a hypothetical situation. We've got a family, mom, dad and a few kids. None of them are believers. None of them have ever entertained faith in Jesus Christ. They may or may not own a Bible but there is no faith in that home. Let's just say through vacation Bible school or a friend on a ball team or whatever means, that one of the children comes to believe in Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior. I do know of many cases where that child's salvation has led to the salvation of their parents, other siblings and such, but statistically, statistically there is only a 3.5% chance that the entire family will get saved. That's it. If the child is first.

But we all know that momma can somehow impact our lives more than any, right? So let's say that through a women's Bible study, maybe a group of friends, maybe a preschool ministry, whatever it is, that the mom is the first one to come to faith in Christ. Statistically speaking, 17% of the time the rest of the family will come to faith, 17%. That's it. I don't find it by accident that when you get into 1 Corinthians it's talking about these two people who marry that are not believers, and the wife becomes a believer and there's this struggle, "What do I do?" And he says, "Hang in there. Be resilient. Live a life of righteousness and sanctification," because rarely when the wife gets saved first does the husband, much less the children.

But what if it's dad? Alright, guys, I recognize that we live in a world where all genders, there are two genders, by the way, not all, all means two biblically, okay? Let me rephrase, both genders are equally valued before God. I realize that. Equal worth before God. But when the dad is the first to get saved, do you know that statistically speaking 93% of the time, 93% of the time the rest of the family will get saved. You see, when you want to be real strategic, guys, let me talk to you for just a minute. It's us. Now I know that's politically incorrect and probably insensitive but, oh well, don't let the facts get in the way of your personal agenda, right? 93% of the time.

Now who is it traditionally that goes into battle? Who went into battle in the Old Testament? David and the men, correct? Traditionally until recent days it was the men that went into battle. Spiritually speaking, guys, we need to be in the battle. Now ladies, that does not exonerate you, young people, that does not exonerate you because it says, "Go ye," all of you. But guys, if we really want this thing to change, we as men and dads

and husbands better make this the priority in our home versus whatever else competes with it.

Last but not least. When? When should we do this? A good time would have been yesterday. That's how far we are behind the curve. 1 Corinthians 6 makes this very interesting statement, "Today is the day of salvation." How often have we been guilty of saying, "Well, when things slow down or when things change, or when this happens." Or I've got one, "When the pandemic's over." Folks, this thing may never be over. I don't know. How good are we at making excuses and procrastinating? When? Today.

And so the obstacles are before us but so is the opportunity, and if we are ever going to see our culture, our nation, and our country come to the things of God in a real meaningful way, then we can't wait for a pandemic to end or we can't wait for this to pass or that to happen, what we've got to do is say, "Okay, today and particularly tomorrow when the alarm goes off, I'm gonna take my faith seriously and make sure those who I have impact with receive the same message." Notice what the Israelites said, "Can God?" God can, the real question is will you?